

QUEENS VOICE

VNSNY Honors Veterans Day on 11/11, and Throughout the Year

November 09, 2021



By Chandra Wilson

Veterans Day is a time to pay respects to the brave service men and women who have served our country and reflect upon the heroism of those who died in service. We owe a debt of gratitude to those among us who have served and continue to serve and protect our American freedom. It is important to remember our “vets” not just on November 11th, or during November’s Military Appreciation Month, however—they need our support every day of the year.

At the not-for-profit Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY), veterans receive special care with two programs aimed at helping veterans navigate the complex world of healthcare benefits and services that those who’ve served our country are entitled to and so richly deserve.

Led by Director Joseph Vitti, himself an Army veteran, the VNSNY Veterans Programs provide veterans and their loved ones with a skilled veteran liaison, who is available to assist and guide them with accessing the many benefits and services available through VNSNY, the Veterans Administration (VA) and other national and community resources.

In addition to the benefits and services offered by VNSNY, individuals in the **VNSNY Home Health Care Veterans Program** may also receive advocacy, education and guidance about health and community resources available to them and their families from dedicated liaisons, many of them veterans themselves, who have a unique understanding of veterans’ needs. All veterans are eligible for the VNSNY programs, regardless of their rank, branch or military or length of service.

“Anytime we are working with veterans, it’s important to remember that many have already faced life and death on the battlefield,” says Joseph Vitti, Director of the VNSNY Veterans Program. “Veterans are selfless people who want to help others. Now, they’re asking a health care team and their family or friends to take care of them, and they often find it hard.”

VNSNY Hospice Veterans Program Director Joseph Vitti and his colleagues Christopher Webster, Sung Yoon, Erica Wigley and VA Benefits Specialist Frank Quadrino, are honored to serve their brothers and sisters in the military and proud to have had such a positive impact on thousands of New York City veterans at the end of life and their families. They understand that it often takes a fellow veteran to connect with and relate to other veterans, giving them a unique perspective, which lends itself to providing highly personalized care.

“In the service, we always say that we never leave a brother or a sister behind,” said Christopher Webster, Veteran Liaison for VNSNY Home Care, and a retired Army medic. “Our fellow veterans were always there for us and we will always be there for them whenever they need us.”

The team believes that one of the most meaningful aspects of the work they do is when they are able to honor a veteran with a bedside ceremony at the end of life—presenting him or her with duplicates of the medals he/she earned, and a copy of their discharge papers. Over the years, for many veterans, these documents may become lost or misplaced, and at end of life especially, reclaiming the honors can be an especially meaningful experience for veterans and their families.

“There’s a special bond that exists among those who have served that can never be broken,” says Sung Yoon. “We appreciate these men and women on a level many others cannot because we’ve been through what they’ve been through.”

Joseph, Chris, Sung and Erica reach out to the VA, **Department of Defense** and the **National Archives** to verify and reclaim the medals for a veteran, and they are awarded one-by-one as part of the **VNSNY “We Honor Veterans”** program, part of VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care. This personalized and compassionate approach to care and community support has earned VNSNY the highest level (Level Five) in the national “We Honor Veterans” program, an endeavor of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization with aid from the VA. Among other services, this Level Five emphasizes care for veterans of the Vietnam War, many of whom experience chronic and debilitating oncological and neurological symptoms as a result of exposure to Agent Orange.

"The compassionate care VNSNY provides is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job," says VNSNY Veterans Hospice Liaison Erica Wigley. "Sometimes, people ask me how I can work in hospice, and I reply, 'How can I not?' Providing support and comfort to veterans and their families at the end of life, and dedicated time during the final stage of life, is a humbling service. It gives patients and their families the chance to make the most of their time together and helps reduce panic and stress."

“Our veterans have given so much for our country, and honoring them in these special ways as we provide their care is just the right thing to do,” Vitti says. “They truly are heroes.”

To learn more about VNSNY Veterans Home Health Care Program, or VNSNY’s “We Honor Veterans” Hospice Program, please call 1-646-983-3999. To find out more about VNSNY Hospice, call 1-212-609-1900.